

Story 2062 (Transcribed by Narrator: Ensar Durdağı, 69
Ahmet Ali Arslan from his
tape and later used in his Location: Zinzal village, Çıldır
unpublished dissertation.) kaza, Ardahan Province

Date: June 23, 1977

Crooked Brother and Straight Brother

When¹ time was within time², and the sieve was in the
straw³, when the camel was a town crier and the rooster was

¹All of this paragraph except for the final clause is a tekerleme, the formulaic opening for many Turkish folktales. A full tekerleme may run to several lines, though most narrators nowadays use only one or two parts of a tekerleme. The tekerleme is a nonsense jingle filled with paradoxes and other comic incongruities. It is meant both to amuse and to alert the audience to the fact that a tale is to follow. Some of the humor is lost in translation because it is difficult to reproduce the rhyme scheme in English.

²"Time within time" refers to the chronology of events in an interior world. A person may dream or fantasize at great length during only a few seconds of ordinary time. One may even seem to spend many years in that other world within; one may take a job, marry, have children, and see those children grow to maturity. In Turkish this is called Zaman Zaman İçinde. It is elsewhere sometimes referred to as "Frozen Time" or "Moments of Eternity."

³The sieve is never in the straw. While threshing grain, workers pass the detached grain and finely ground straw through a large-mesh sieve. Longer pieces of straw which may still have grains attached to them do not pass through and will need further threshing. So, the straw is in the sieve, not the sieve in the straw.

Story 2062

a barber, when the woodcutter had no axe and a girl was coming from the public bath with her belly naked--well back in those days there were a crooked brother and a straight brother.

The crooked older brother was a thief who continually stole things. One day the two brothers renewed a quarrel they had been having for some time. The straight brother had pleaded with his crooked brother to become honest. He now said again, "Hey, brother, give up this thievery. Walk the proper path shown to us by Allah. What will become of you if you continue this way?"

"No, stealing is my trade," answered the older brother.

"Well, let us test our different ways of life," suggested the straight brother. "Let us both take journeys starting at the same time and the same place. I shall take the straight path, and you will take the crooked one. Let us see which of us will be aided by Allah."

"Very well," answered the crooked brother. He mounted his short-tailed donkey and set forth.

The straight brother departed at the same time, but he traveled on foot. He went little, he went far. He

Story 2062

traveled across plains and over mountains.⁴ On the peak of one mountain he came to an unoccupied cabin. Opening the door, he entered that cabin. What did he see inside? He saw a cauldron filled with pilav⁵ and covered with a large tray of ketes⁶. The younger brother was very hungry by then, but he said to himself, "I cannot eat these foods. How could I? They belong to someone else. I could not eat them even if I were starving to death.

Knowing that someone must be coming to this cabin, the younger brother hid himself behind a door. After awhile there arrived at the cabin a fox, a devil, and a jinn⁷.

⁴A pair of formulaic expressions used to indicate briefly the extent of a long trip.

⁵A rice dish containing flecks of meat and sometimes pine nuts.

⁶A kete is a cake made with rice flour.

⁷The word jinn suggests two very different kinds of supernatural creatures. The first is the huge supernatural being who comes forth from a bottle or appears in response to some signal, such as the rubbing of a magic lamp or ring. This creature then proceeds to give the caller supernatural or magic aid to achieve what he wishes. The other kind of jinn is never seen. It is a spiritual force referred to in some Sufi beliefs and in other mystical systems.

Story 2062

The three of them sat upon cushions and began to eat talk. The devil said, "Brother Fox, you start our usual conversation. Talk to us."

"What shall I talk about?"

"Whatever you wish to talk about. Tell us about some experience you have had since our last meeting."

"By Allah, I recently acquired a bagful of gold coins. Behind the next house along this road is a large cypress tree beneath which I buried that gold. Whenever I wish to enjoy myself, I go and dig up that gold and play with it in the bright sunlight. The sun will make it glisten so much that it will be beautiful. Afterwards I shall, of course bury it securely again, for if any human being should learn about it, he would take it from me."

"Now, Brother Jinn, why don't you tell us about something interesting?" asked the devil.

"Well, what should I talk about? Let me tell you about the daughter of a shah who lives at such and such a place. I drove her mad. She was, in fact, so very crazy that none of the doctors or hocas⁸ could find a cure for her. But if

⁸A hoca is a preacher and the religious leader of a community. In pre-Republican times the hoca was also the community teacher. Separation of church and state in the Republic required that teachers be people of secular rather than of religious training.

Story 2062

a human being should take to her a piece of the cushion upon which I am sitting, it would cure her madness at once. But keep this matter secret, for if some human being learns of it and cures her, then I myself shall immediately go mad."

The fox then said, "Brother Devil, now it is your turn to entertain us with some interesting news."

"What shall I talk about?" said the devil. "It may not be interesting to you, but I shall give you some news about a bridge that is being constructed. The shah of a certain region is having a large bridge built. There are many laborers and a number of craftsmen working on it. They work steadily from morning until night. After sunset, however, I go there and destroy all that they had achieved that day, and while I am doing that, I also kill any of the workers who are still there. No one knows what to do to prevent my destruction, but there is a way to stop it. If anyone were to pull the nails from the shoes of seven mules and place them all around the bridge site, I would be unable to get close to that place. Then I could do nothing but grieve about my lost power."

After the fox, the devil, and the jinn had left the cabin, the straight brother came out of hiding. He tore

Story 2062

a small piece of cloth from the jinn's cushion and put it into his pocket. He then went to the cypress tree behind the nearby house and dug up all of the fox's gold. He then left that area and began to search for the bridge which the devil kept from being completed. He went little, he went far, and after awhile he reached the bridge site, where he found a great throng of men at work. He said, "Selamüna-leyküm" to one group of workers

"Aleykümselam,"⁹ they replied.

"What are you all doing here, brothers?"

"We are trying to build a great bridge," they replied

"Bravo!" said the straight brother. "May Allah be with you and help you!"

"Thank you!" they replied. "We are working very hard on it, but

"But what?"

They responded, "We work on this bridge throughout the entire day, but when we return the following morning,

⁹Selamünaleyküm/Aleykümselam--traditional exchange of greetings between Moslems not well acquainted with each other. It means roughly May peace be unto you/And may peace be unto you too. If Selamünaleyküm is not responded to, the speaker should be wary of the one so addressed.

Story 2062

we find that all that we had accomplished had been destroyed. We have been unable to progress at all, and a great many of our most skillful workers have been killed."

"What would you give me if I could stop the damage being done to the bridge structure?" asked the straight brother.

"Our shah would probably give you whatever you might want if you could really do that."

"Brothers, my condition for doing this should be presented to your shah. If he will reward me with my weight in gold, I could see to it that your bridge could be completed. If damage to the bridge does not cease, he can have me beheaded

One of the master craftsmen agreed to take the younger brother into the presence of the shah. When they arrived at the palace, the straight brother said, "Selamünaleyküm, Your Majesty

"Aleykümselam, son. What is it that you have come here for?"

"Your Majesty, I went and observed the great bridge which you are trying to have constructed. Workers there told me that they were having such and such problems. I

Story 2062

know how to protect the construction as it is going along, and I can assure you that the bridge will be completed.

What I want from you as pay for my work is my weight in gold."

"I agree to that, my son," said the shah. "Is there anything else that you need in order to carry on your work?"

"The only supplies that I shall need are the nails that have been removed from the shoes of seven mules." The shah obtained those special nails and gave them to the younger brother. That straight brother went at once to the bridge site and ordered one of the master craftsmen to insert the nails at intervals in all the footings of the bridge. This the master craftsman did as the rest of construction crew was completing its day's work.

When they returned on the following morning, they discovered that their achievements were intact. When good news reached the palace, the shah ordered that the straight brother be given his weight in gold. The young man loaded that gold on the back of a packhorse and departed. He went little, he went far, and finally reached the city where the mad princess lived.

As he entered that city, the straight brother saw a large crowd of people gathered in the street. He asked a

Story 2062

person in that crowd, "What has happened? Why are you all gathered here?"

"Haven't you heard the news?" asked that person.

"No, I have not," answered the younger brother.

"The daughter of the shah went mad some time ago.

The shah had many doctors and hocas examine the girl, but none of them was able to cure her madness. Now he has just announced that he will give the princess in marriage to any man who can cure her."

"Brother, can you take me to the palace? I think that I could help that girl."

After the straight brother was shown into the presence of the shah, he said, "Selamünaleyküm, Your Majesty.

"Aleykümselam, son. Why are you here?"

"My shah, I heard that your daughter had gone mad. I came here to help her."

The ruler said, "If you can restore her sanity, I shall give her to you in marriage. But if you try and fail, I shall have you executed."

The younger brother answered, "All right, my shah. My neck is thinner than a hair. If I cannot cure her, you may behead me. But in order to try to cure her, I shall have to talk with her in a private room."

Story 2062

They permitted him to visit the girl in the privacy of a separate room. They supposed that he would recite prayers and blow them at the girl.¹⁰ But he did not do any such thing. He sewed to her dress the piece of the jinn's cushion he had brought with him from the cabin on the mountain peak. The girl began to recover at once without fainting or becoming sick. When the palace attendants discovered what had happened, they rushed to the throne room and said, "Our shah, the young stranger has cured your daughter. She has been saved!"

When the shah heard this good news, he issued an order to his viziers: "Have all the fireplaces stoked and place upon them great cauldrons of food to be cooked. Start the beating of drums."¹¹ We shall have a great wedding celebration for the marriage of my daughter to the young man who cured her

¹⁰Applying a spiritual or psychological remedy by means of breath has long been a practice throughout much of the Middle East. By the end of the Ottoman Empire such blowing had become a widespread abuse practiced by religious or pseudoreligious figures. One of the Kemalist Reforms in the 1920s outlawed "blowers."

¹¹Drums are beaten for almost every festivity in Turkey. During wedding celebrations their sound continues throughout all hours of the day.

Story 2062

Drums were beaten throughout the long celebration. All hungry people were fed. Poor people were provided with clothing. After the festivities had ended and the young couple had been married, the shah had the bridegroom placed upon the throne. He took off his crown and put it on the young man's head, saying, "You will from now on be my son-in-law. The throne is now yours. May you eat and drink and be very happy."

The straight brother had acquired all of the things that can make a person happy in this world. He ruled for twenty or twenty-five days without experiencing anything unusual. Then one morning as he was looking out of a palace window, he saw his older brother riding down the street on his short-tailed donkey. The straight brother whistled loudly from the window. When the crooked brother looked up at the window, he discovered the height his younger brother had reached. He said, "How very remarkable! What was it that brought you to such a high position? How did it happen? Find some way in which I can also be successful."

The new ruler said, "Brother, I have already advised you what to do. Lead a straight life and Allah will help you. What can I do if Allah does not choose to help you?"

Story 2062

Hearing that, the crooked brother rode away on his short-tailed donkey. He rode and he rode until he reached the cabin on the mountain peak which his brother had visited earlier. Tying his donkey outside, he entered the cabin, where he saw the cauldron again filled with pilav; on the cover of the cauldron were five or ten ketes. He thought, "What a pleasant thing this is!" and he began eating at once. He had become so accustomed to stealing things that he gave no thought to the fact that this food must belong to someone else. He ate all of the pilav and ketes, and then he hid himself behind a door. Not long after that, he saw a fox enter the cabin. Later a jinn and a devil arrived. They sat down to eat, but when they discovered that there was no food there for them, they sat motionless, looking each other in the eye.

Then the jinn said, "Brother Fox, why do you have such a long face? Tell us what your difficulty is."

The fox answered, "What can I say? You urged me to speak during our last meeting here. There must have been a human being here who overheard what I said, for shortly after that someone took all of my gold. That is why I am sad."

Story 2062

Then the devil spoke up. "I too hardly know what to say. There must indeed have been a human being here during our last meeting. He got the nails from the shoes of seven mules and placed them in the footings of the bridge I enjoyed damaging. After that it became impossible for me to harm that bridge in any way. With my favorite pastime destroyed, I too am very sad!"

The jinn spoke last. He said, "You had me speak too at our last meeting. Whatever human being was here took a piece of my cushion and attached it to the clothing of the mad princess. By doing that, he cured the girl but made me sick. I can no longer get near the girl. All of this has made me too very sad."

Having now told each other about their individual losses, they asked, "What can we do about this now?" After discussing this question for awhile, they agreed, "We should find that human being and punish him!"

The fox said, "I have a very keen sense of smell, and I shall be able to detect the scent of a human being.

The jinn said, "I can descend to the greatest depths in search of him."

The devil then said, "I can fly to the greatest of heights in pursuit of him."

Story

All three stood up, and the jinn and the devil went outside the door and prepared to begin their searching. The fox moved more slowly, and he was still in the cabin when he detected the smell of human flesh. He found the crooked brother and dragged him by the collar from behind the door. When the two began fighting, the noise drew the jinn and the devil back into the cabin. The crooked brother was no match for those three opponents, who beat him so fiercely that he was badly injured. This is what happened to the crooked brother, but the straight brother experienced something quite different.

Three apples fell from the sky. One was for me, one was for the narrator, and one was for Ensar Durdağı.¹²

¹²This is a conventional formula for terminating Turkish folktales. It may vary slightly from tale to tale, but its humor usually derives from the narrator's sly way of appropriating at least two of the apples for himself.